

## Acts 1:12-26

### Prayer and the People of Mission

Intro: Who are you and what do you do? Those are typical questions we ask when we meet someone. It the basic way we get oriented to a person. I think it's the same question that Luke wrote in Luke/Acts and had in mind.

Who is *Jesus*, what is *he* doing?

#### Background to Acts

- Traditionally has been called Acts of the Apostles
- Divided into two main sections. Peter's ministry (1-12); then Paul's mission to the Gentiles (13-28)
- The geographic expansion theme (1:8) drives the narrative forward
- Smaller subunits marked similar phases of God's Word growing (6:7, 9:31, 12:24, 15:5, 19:20, 28:30)—Acts is marked by geographic spread of God's Word to all peoples
- Written around 62 AD—Paul is alive (Ch 28); written by Luke to Theophilus (Luke-Acts is a single work, meant to be read together)

Main purpose: To edify Christians by reminding us what the exalted Lord Jesus can do through his Spirit.

- Now I've heard before someone say, "The church is called to relive the books of Acts. That's how radical we should be."
- Actually, the people we meet in Acts are more raw than radical. In other words, we see a lot of ordinary people like us in many ways.

"The history in Acts is full of people who don't get along, who don't catch on, and who don't always rise eagerly to the challenge of discipleship. On the other hand, this history is also real in demonstrating the powerful impact of Jesus, risen and enthroned, *at work among these flawed people by his quiet but invincible strength.*" (Dennis Johnson *The Message of Acts*)

In other words, Acts was not written so that we can admire super spiritual giants. It written for us, the rank and file believer—who often don't feel like we measure up.

In light of who Jesus is, and what he can do, this is what we the church are called to be:

1. We are an obedient people (v12)

- The first movement is the disciples to Jerusalem from the Mt of Olives.
- This was not just on a whim, but is direct connection to what Jesus told them back in v4.
- The first moment is toward *obedience*.

Even though Jesus is not physically present, it does not mean obedience is optional.

- We can't claim to be Jesus's people if we don't have hearts of obedience.
- (Jn 14:15) "If you love me, you will obey what I command"

Obedying Jesus is the way we express our love and faith to him. It's the most *concrete way*. What other way is more concrete than obedience? We can sing, and that expresses our joy and adoration. I guess you can wear a Jesus t-shirt, like the one I've seen that says "Y'all need Jesus" ...but that's not the same as obeying him from the heart. "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice." (1 Sam 15:22)

This is where many people struggle with possessing Jesus as their *Lord*. Some have intellectual struggles of faith, but some just don't want to have Jesus calling the shots. That's a line too difficult to cross.

If I say I'm a disciple, then obedience is at the center of how I need to live each day. Not that in my obedience do I merit saving grace, or Christ loves me more. But if we love him, we will obey what he commands.

2. We are a praying people (v14, 24)

- We will revisit this more later, but for now just note that waiting on Jesus to work (v4) is not passively sitting on our hands.

*And one of the main ways the church blesses the world is through prayer.*

3. We are a Scripture people (v15-20)

- Christians have often been called a people of the book, and rightly so.

- In v 15, Peter stands up and takes a leading role in the church.
- But he goes *quickly to the Scripture* to guide the church through the first major decision—finding a replacement for Judas.

-12 apostles represent the number of Israel's tribes, so it's fitting that the full number be there.

- *The importance of apostleship*: they are God's chosen interments to lay the foundation of the church; the apostles carry a unique authority in that role. They are listed twice (Lk 6:14, and here v13).

(Eph 2:19-20) — “the foundation of the apostles”

(1 Cor 12:28) — “and God has appointed in the church *first* apostles”

I grew up in the north where almost every house has a basement. When I went house shopping I was told to spend a lot of time in the basement. Not to envision a future man cave...but because it's the foundation. The whole structure of the house rests on the foundation. A good foundation means a solid house.

For 2000 years the whole structure of our faith rests on the truth of the early witness and writings (New Testament) of the apostles. They are indispensable.

- Peter, as the leader among the apostles—turns to scripture as a guide (Ps 69:25, 109:8).
- It's actually significant that the church does not turn to Peter's word for direction—but instead Peter directs the church to God's Word. *God's Word creates his people.*

Both scriptures speak about the fate of Judas

- First, we need to know the Psalms are meant to be read Messianically—the experience of David foreshadows the experience of Christ.
- Ps 69:25 Judas is in the enemy camp. His place (i.e. Field of Blood) will not be lived in; rather it's a gravesite.
- Ps 109:8 refers to a premature death of a rebel who works against the Messiah. Which leaves a leadership spot vacant.

Both fit Judas. The blood money he betrayed Christ with was used to purchase a field. According to Mt 27:8, the priests actually bought the field with the money Judas returned; Judas must have committed suicide. *It's a gruesome picture of what it looks like to turn away from Christ.*

- Peter affirms something else critical about the Bible—it’s divine inspiration (v16) “the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David”.

This is a good time to ask ourselves how we view this book? Do we really believe that when we hear Scripture, we hear the Spirit of God speak? If so, we don’t treat it lightly. There is no room for getting bored with the Bible if we are disciples. It’s how we hear the living Spirit of God speak his heart to us! Disciples should have a huge appetite for the Word, because we have an appetite for hearing God.

#### 4. We are a guided people (v24-26)

- After the disciples sought guidance from Scripture, they need to make a concrete decision.
- Two men are nominated to replace Judas. Barsabbas and Matthias.
- Again, we see they lean heavily on prayer (v24).
- Then, they do something unusual to us—they cast lots (v26)

Casting lots was a way God-fearing Jews made decisions. A cup would contain marked stones, and whichever fell out first was considered appointed by God (Prov 16:33).

—This is the *final time* in the NT we see this; it seems with the arrival of the Spirit, there is no need. The Spirit would direct differently.

This is a helpful reminder that not everything we read in Acts is normative for the church today. We want to ask ourselves as we read, “Is this an action or an attitude of something we need to duplicate?” It’s the attitude here that counts—total submission to God’s sovereign choice.

- Look also at v24. The prayer that was actually offered up states that God knows the hearts of all.

This hits on an important biblical theme—the heart. God cares much, much more about what is going on inside than what appears on the outside. We can become overly focused on the outward appearance—God really cares little about that. God places the highest value on our *heart*

- Now the way the heart is used in the Bible is different than how we use it in English. Usually *heart* in English is the emotions —(E.G. The boy’s heart was broken when his dog died)—biblically the emotions are the bowels or gut.
- The Bible uses *heart* to refer to our motivational center. It is the seat of our desires, will, intellect, actions.

For example, picture two husbands. One husband may secretly sneak some porn on Saturday evening... the action comes from his heart; another husband tells his wife how beautiful she looks before church...both actions arise from the heart (desires, will, motivation).

- The Lord alone has access to the heart unlike any other.

(1 Sam 16:7) “Man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart”

(Ps 44:21) “For he knows the secrets of the heart”

(Rev 2:23) “I am he who searches mind and heart” — (From Jesus, proof of his divinity)

There is application here for ourselves—the heart matters most. The most important thing about me is my heart. That’s what God sees. Don’t be deceived by neglecting your heart, brothers and sisters.

Also, as members who have responsibility to nominate new leaders, we do well to have the attitude of the disciples. We seek the guiding hand of God who knows the heart. *Church leader selection is never a popularity contest; it’s always submitted to the God who searches the heart.* What matters most when I look at these men’s names is what God sees in their hearts.

### Conclusion:

Finally, let’s come back to devoted prayer. Prayer takes pride of place. *It’s the first major activity we see the disciples involved in.* As the disciples wait, they pray. As they make decisions, they pray.

In fact, at major turning points in Acts *we don’t see the disciples planning...but praying.*

Here in (1:24)

(8:15) —Gospel breaks into Samaria, the apostles “came down and prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit”

(9:11)—Paul’s conversion (he was blind for 3 days); “look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying”

(10:4) —Gospel goes to Gentiles; a man Cornelius is praying “Your prayers... have ascended as a memorial before God.”

(13:3)—Paul and Barnabas are commissioned; “Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.”

Notice that all these prayers center around a certain theme: Conversions, gospel work and gospel workers. Christian, does that fill our prayer list? Do we give priority of place to praying for conversion, gospel work and workers?

### Conclusion

As I prepared this, I looked back over to times God did some amazing things. They almost always happened when I prayed *consistently*, and *unified* with others.

One example:

When I moved to the Midwest in 2011, I found a group of guys who were excited about the gospel and hungry for the Word of God. There were four of us. I was the only pastor in the group. One man was a roofer, another a salesman, and the third guy who worked on farming equipment. It was a very organic group. We met once a week, from 5am-6am just to pray. We spent the first 15 minutes or so reading some scripture to guide us, sharing some requests and then usually the next 45 praying. I can't remember what we prayed for, only that we prayed. We did this for several years. Eventually two of the men linked arms to plant a biblically faithful church in a town where there literally was not one; the 3rd is in full time ministry. We prayed and the word of God increased and disciples are still multiplying. We never planned anything...we just prayed.

That's the way God works—so much of what the Lord Jesus does is by *ordinary faithfulness to prayer*.

He wants to use us, use you on mission. I'm certain of that. I am also certain that nothing good and lasting will probably happen unless we devoted ourselves to prayer.